

# A REINVENTION

## John Orr recently left his Astoria law practice to pursue recycling work and music

It seems unlikely that an attorney would give up a successful practice of 25 years for a life of music and recycling. But that's just what John Orr did. Yes, you'll occasionally see his name in the paper as a Municipal Court Judge, but not often. You're more likely to see his face in the paper as a member of the global music group Acústica or of his new jazz quartet.

Orr explains that he became interested in the law, "because of one of my boyhood heroes, Robert F. Kennedy." Orr once saw Kennedy when he came to Orr's hometown of Kalamazoo, Michigan. "I was enamored of his idealism and personal charisma," Orr says. "His assassination was my introduction to mortality."

Orr decided to either go into politics or to become a legal crusader. "It didn't quite work out that way," he says. He became a lawyer, but not a crusader: a small town lawyer in private practice in family law and criminal defense.

Still, the idealism never left Orr, nor did his love of music, which predated his interest in the law. As a youth, he says, "I had competing parts of myself. I had to please my mother by establishing that I had middle class respectability, but I had a bohemian side, too." It was this bohemian side that brought Orr from Kalamazoo to Oregon via Arizona and California. "I had wanderlust in my youth," Orr recounts. "I traveled in search of musical experience, and I fell in love with the wide American West."

Along the way, Orr took college courses in jazz and played in various groups, including jazz bands and a country rock and Western swing band. Eventually he quit music as he concentrated on the law.

It's not uncommon, in midlife, to look

back on the decisions one has made, and to wonder what might have been. What is unusual is returning to that youthful idealism and use it as a basis to reinvent one's life. John Orr closed his legal practice, returned to music, and took a job with Trails End Recovery, a material recovery and recycling facility in Warrenton.

"I like the transition from law to recycling," Orr says. "It was hard on my heart to do that kind of work so long, and recycling is so much less adversarial. It comports with what I thought I'd be doing when I had a law degree. Environmental law would have been more congruent with what I wanted to do with my life."

Now he has a lot more time for playing music, too, and for songwriting, and he has written music for Acústica. He plays guitar, pedal steel guitar, Dobro and flute. "I've dabbled with alto sax and harmonica," he adds.

In addition to playing with Acústica, Orr is on the board of the Astoria Music Festival and is forming a jazz quartet, which he jokingly calls the "Trio Quartet." Now that they've found a bass player, though, the group is an actual quartet and may soon be playing local gigs.

The quartet plays the bop and cool jazz of the 1950s and '60s, "and it is forcing me to raise my game," Orr says. "Jazz is infinitely more intellectually and aesthetically challenging. You can't just do it, you have to express with homage to the original melody and rhythm."

Orr's interests go beyond music and recycling. His bookshelves are lined with thick tomes that reflect his interest in history (he's currently working on a book about World War II) and original fine art hangs on the walls. His major interest, though, is his fiancé, Teresa Brownlie, who has resolutely supported Orr as he reinvents his life.

John Orr is a contented man, with no signs of a midlife crisis. "I'm as happy as I've ever been," he says, "due in no small part to Teresa. My happiness is equal parts being done with the law and having found Teresa."



Teresa Brownlie has supported her fiancé, John Orr, as he made a career change from being an attorney to working in recycling.



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## Coastal Life

Story and photos by DWIGHT CASWELL

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